County says no to Bench Creek move

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The Wasatch County Commission last week expressed strong disapproval for allowing Bench Creek to be annexed by Summit County. They asked county voters to vote against the proposal on the November ballot, and said they would also ask the county attorney to investigate to see if there is some way to block the move.

Sixteen Bench Creek residents, including nine qualified, registered voters, signed the petition for annexation, all that is required in order for the question to be posed to both Wasatch and Summit County voters in the November election. A majority of voters in both counties must approve the annexation in order for it to take place.

The main reason the annexation has been requested, according to Tom Clyde, a Bench Creek resident, is that their children attend Summit County schools, but don't qualify for representation on the school board.

Wasatch County officials were caught unprepared for the election because when Mr. Clyde first presented the issue to the county, he thought the petition had been stolen with some other items out of his car and said he would circulate a new one. He apparently found it and submitted it to the county a short time later, but the commissioners said they hadn't been told about it.

Commissioner Pete Coleman said he didn't think the county was very well protected if only nine people could bring about an election that would effect the entire county.

"Say the assets in that area were high enough that Summit County wanted it...And they push for these people to get up a petition, saying, 'We want your tax base in our county.' If the other county is naive and stupid, and hangs back, conceivably it could happen all over the state," said Commissioner Larry Duke.

Commissioner Coleman said he wasn't concerned about losing Bench Creek, but that it would be difficult to deal with unresolved planning and zoning, and health department problems at Woodland Estates, southwest of Bench Creek. He suggested that Woodland Estates should be annexed if Bench Creek is, but pointed out that the issue couldn't be addressed before the election.

Bob Mathis, county planner, said he thought Woodland Estates was included in the proposed annexation and said he would look into it.

The commissioners were also concerned about the precedent that will be set if the annexation is approved. Commissioner Coleman pointed out that Wasatch could lose Wallsburg, Soldier Summit and Mayflower to neighboring counties the same way.

Mr. Mathis said he thought the area in question included a little bit of forest property, which the commissioners pointed out would effect the payments in lieu of taxes the county r. .eives from the U.S. Forest Service.

Commissioner asked if anyone knew about any changes in county borders since they were set fifty years ago and Mr. Mathis said he had checked and there were none that he knew about.

"It's hard for me to take," Mr. Mathis said. "You work your fool head off to get them two bridges — that's not simple for us. Summit County never considered those. If it hadn't been for our going to them and asking them, they wouldn't have done it at all. Then we've been paving roads...I've met with those people constantly and worked hard with them to try to resolve problems, and all it's done is aggravate and agitate."

Commissioner Coleman said the two county commissions should meet in an open meeting to discuss the pros and cons of the issue before the election. He said he was sympathetic with the argument that parents should be able to run for a seat on the school board in the district where their children attend school. However, he said there are other issues to be resolved and that Bench Creek residents shouldn't make the decision alone.

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"I think there have to be a lot of questions answered before we can say 'yes', we approve of it. I think the approach has been wrong," he said.

Commissioner Duke agreed, adding, "The tail's trying to wag the dog."